



**FOL: TEN YEARS OF CONTRIBUTION TO THE REGIONAL FIGHT AGAINST
DRUG TRAFFICKING AND TO THE COMMUNITY OF MANTA**

The Forward Operating Location (FOL) proved extremely useful in carrying out the regional efforts against drug trafficking during the last ten years. From the beginning of its operations through July of 2009, the Manta FOL completed more than 5,500 anti-drug missions and made possible the seizure of more than 1,700 metric tons of illegal drugs, with an estimated street value of 35.1 billion dollars.

During that time, thousands of officials from the U.S. Armed Forces, Customs, and Coast Guard worked from the FOL to advance the regional fight against drug trafficking, striving to meet the highest standards of professionalism that distinguish each service branch. With the cooperation of their hosts, the 23rd Combat Wing at the Eloy Alfaro Ecuadorian Air Base, they completed their mission with safety and efficiency.

The U.S. Government invested an estimated 71 million dollars in improvements to the landing strip, surrounding areas and new lighting. It also built 39 facilities, including a cafeteria, dormitories, offices, warehouses, a hangar, a fire station, and an aircraft ramp.

Additionally, 2.6 million dollars were invested each year in the operation of the FOL's facilities, plus an investment of 1.3 million dollars for the operation of the fire station alone. The total annual contribution to the local economy was approximately 8.3 million dollars.

The 478th Expeditionary Squadron provided the personnel and installations needed to service the aircraft flying anti-drug missions from the FOL. The Joint Interagency Task Force South (JIATF-S) based in Key West, Florida, is a task force supported by 12 countries, eight of which are Latin American, Ecuador among them. JIATF-S coordinates the anti-drug monitoring and interdiction efforts in the region. During the last ten years, the JIATF-S used the information gathered by planes taking off from the FOL to guide U.S. and Latin American authorities in making seizures. An Ecuadorian liaison official, working at the JIATF-S, maintained a continuous flow of information to Ecuador's authorities.

The approximately 40 firefighters from the FOL responded to more than 800 emergencies at the airport and in the city of Manta since 2002. They also trained more than 250 Ecuadorian firefighters.

Upon ending their mission in the country, the FOL transferred the facilities built by the U.S. Government to the Ecuadorian Government along with more than 3,500 pieces of equipment valued at an estimated 1.4 million dollars, which amounts to 45% of all its mobile equipment. It also transferred offices, dormitories, and dining areas that were completely equipped and furnished.

Besides playing a significant role in the seizure of illegal drugs, FOL personnel contributed time and resources to the local community with 200 donation events each year. Volunteers from the FOL donated an average of 4,000 hours of work and distributed 150,000 items including clothes, school material, and personal hygiene items to charity organizations in the city of Manta and the entire Manabí province.

Lieutenant Colonel Jared P. Curtis, FOL Administrator, stated “one of the core values of the U.S. Armed Forces is to put service before oneself. I believe our volunteers have been an example of it and that they will leave an enduring and positive impact in the local community.”

FOL photo gallery (high-resolution photos):

<http://photos.state.gov/galleries/ecuador/32152/FOL/>

Video of the month “Faces of the FOL”: <http://spanish.ecuador.usembassy.gov/>